

Dear Chairs Elliott and Slap, Vice Chairs Turco and Flexer, Ranking Members Haines and Witkos, and Members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement:

My name is Yaz Liow and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for **S.B. 3 - An Act Requiring The Board Of Regents For Higher Education To Develop Seminar Programs For Small Businesses**. This bill would give small businesses free seminars on electronic commerce, social media, and virtual currency allowing them to stay resilient during future COVID-19 surges and be competitive in an increasingly digitized marketplace.

Small businesses are the backbone of the Connecticut economy, accounting for 99.4% of all Connecticut businesses and employing 48.4% of all Connecticut employees, according to the Small Business Administration's 2021 Small Business Profiles for States. Connecticut's economic success depends on the success of small businesses' success, and their online presence is more important than ever. Since 2014, worldwide e-commerce sales have skyrocketed from \$1.336 trillion to \$4.938 trillion in 2021. Moreover, social media has become a vital marketing tool for small businesses to thrive in the modern economy and compete in e-commerce. As COVID-19 has become an increasingly clearly endemic virus, small businesses need the resources to establish an online presence to mitigate fallout from future outbreaks when people are less willing to visit stores in-person.

E-commerce sales increased a record breaking 31.8% during 2020 according to the United States Department of Commerce. While most small businesses struggled during the pandemic, e-commerce could have helped them supplement some of the lost in-person. E-commerce will be an important tool for small businesses during future COVID-19 outbreaks. The Department of Commerce also reported that e-commerce sales rose 14.2% in the United States during 2021, even as vaccination rates rose and people began to return to stores in-person. E-commerce's recent rise is not just because of the pandemic. It is a growing industry that small businesses must adapt to, regardless of the pandemic. Marketing Insights, a marketing agency, did a study of 344 social media marketers from around the world. They found that most firms believed that social media positively impacted their brand. Social media helps tap into an audience that may not see many TV or radio ads. It can also serve as a form of free brand awareness. A business can set up an Instagram account for free, drawing attention from potential customers and redirecting more traffic to their website.

According to a Connecticut Small Business Development Center survey of Connecticut small businesses, 75% of respondents experienced at least a 25% decline in revenue from 2019 to 2020. Administered in January 2021, the survey also found that about half of the small businesses surveyed were not confident their business would return to profitability a year out. According to the Small Business Administration's 2021 Small Business Profiles for States, between March 2019 and March 2020, 9,205 small businesses opened and 9,850 closed.

Moreover, small businesses gained 103,088 jobs and lost 114,339 jobs. These were, up to that point, the worst yearly losses since the Great Recession. Even before the pandemic many small businesses in Connecticut were struggling to stay competitive in their rapidly evolving industries.

In conclusion, I urge you to provide Connecticut small businesses with the support that they need and deserve. To compete in the modern economy and endure future COVID-19 outbreaks, small businesses need the resources and knowledge to create an online presence. S.B. 3 provides those vital resources to small businesses whose tight budget would make it difficult to otherwise pay for a private course on these topics. I urge you to favorably vote this bill out of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement to give a much needed boost to Connecticut's economy and its small businesses.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Yaz Liow  
New Haven, CT